

State of Michigan



John Engler, Governor

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Bill Martin, Director

DATE: January 30, 2001

TO: Senator Walter North, Chair, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Corrections
Representative Charles LaSata, Chair, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Corrections

FROM: Bill Martin, Director

SUBJECT: Prison Population Projections

Pursuant to Section 401 of the FY 2001 Budget Bill, please find attached revised prison population projections through calendar year 2005. I am pleased to report that the projections released last year were remarkably accurate throughout the year and were still within 0.3% of the actual prison population at the end of the year (137 prisoners).

It is important to remember that some of the forces that drive prison population growth are outside the control of the Department. Court sentencing practices, the availability of county jail space, parole releases, court decisions and statutory changes limit our ability to estimate future population growth. For example, the eventual impact of new sentencing guidelines and Truth in Sentencing on the prison population continues to be uncertain. This is because insufficient time has passed for reliable data to accumulate regarding the ultimate changes in sentencing practices and release patterns. However, preliminary analysis of prison admissions during 2000 supports our concerns about the potential impact of these unknown factors. Analysis of available data shows neither a dramatic drop in prison admissions among short-term offenders nor a longer average sentence for those who do come to prison, outcomes which were originally anticipated by the Michigan Sentencing Commission. Instead, with 75% of the admissions covered under new sentencing guidelines, there was a small increase in overall intake. Again, the data is incomplete, but I believe this conflict with earlier expectations supports our cautious approach to projecting future prison population growth.

Although we are confident that these adjusted projections do a good job of modeling the trends experienced last year, it is important to note that we continue to be concerned that future population growth could exceed this forecast. We will continue to monitor trends closely through the first part of this year; and, if necessary, issue new projections in July.

Attachment

- c Mary Lannoye, Office of the State Budget, DMB
- Jacques McNeely, Office of Public Protection, DMB
- Marilyn Peterson, House Fiscal Agency
- Karen Firestone, Senate Fiscal Agency
- Corrections Executive Policy Team

PRISON POPULATION PROJECTIONS

Adjustment Date: January, 2001

The revised prison population projections issued last year were extremely accurate throughout calendar year 2000. At the end of December, actual population was only 0.3% lower than projected (137 prisoners out of almost 46,000).

An extensive review of recent intake and release trends confirms many of the observations and concerns that were discussed in last year's release, so it is impossible to improve on the current projections in the short term. Therefore, rather than issuing completely new projections at this time, we instead adjusted the current projections to match the starting population, and neutralized the negligible projection error by fine-tuning the monthly growth estimates for calendar year 2001.

However, there are several factors outside the control of the Department, especially the new sentencing guidelines and Truth in Sentencing laws, that could have an uncertain impact on prison population growth. It is still too early for reliable estimates of the long-term impact of new sentencing guidelines and Truth in Sentencing on sentence length and time served. Since coverage of the new laws is tied to offense date and Truth in Sentencing applies only to selected crimes at first, 25% of sentences to prison in 2000 were still covered by old sentencing guidelines and 74% were not affected by Truth in Sentencing. With the transition to these sweeping statutory changes still underway, valid and reliable predictions of their eventual impact on sentencing and release practices cannot be made. Thus, the adjusted projections continue to incorporate only the known decline in Community Residential Programs (CRP) population under Truth in Sentencing (due to its prohibition on placement in CRP throughout the minimum sentence).

In essence, we believe the current projections will continue to be accurate until we see a definite change in the short-term trends, or until the true long-term effects of new sentencing guidelines and Truth in Sentencing become more certain. Projection accuracy will be monitored closely, and a revised forecast will be issued in July if necessary.

Current Situation

In calendar year 2000, the prisoner population housed in institutions and camps grew 3% (+1,321 inmates) -- nearly double the amount of growth that was experienced in 1999 (+679). The projections issued last year correctly forecast more growth, and they expect similar growth for 2001.

The adjusted projections in this report are based on a continuation of calendar year 2000 trends. A close analysis of intake and release trends shows remarkable stability over the past year and suggests that there is little reason to expect significant shifts in the short term. However, changes in the underlying factors that drive prison population growth, many of which are outside the control of the Department, could quickly undermine the accuracy of projections based on a stability model.

For example, prison intake increased by 3% in 2000 compared to 1999. While that is not a dramatic increase, continued higher intake could lead to more growth than expected. The issue of whether prison intake will remain at this level demonstrates why it is still too early to make reliable estimates of the impact

of new sentencing guidelines and Truth in Sentencing. The Michigan Sentencing Commission expected new sentencing guidelines to cause: (1) A sharp drop in prison intake due to fewer commitments of “short-termers” serving sentences for less serious crimes, and (2) Longer average minimum prison terms due to more commitments for serious crimes and longer sentences for those crimes. Instead, preliminary analyses of early prison intake data under new sentencing guidelines show higher prison intake with somewhat shorter average sentences than in the past (although the slight drop in average sentence length will have an insignificant impact on prison population growth). Since this is counter to the expectations of the experts at the time, making any estimates of the eventual impact of new sentencing guidelines would be particularly ill-advised until sufficient time has passed, enough data have accumulated and thorough analyses can be conducted. This is even more the case for Truth in Sentencing, since less than one-quarter of overall prison intake has been affected by it so far. Absent any adjustments for new sentencing guidelines and Truth in Sentencing, it is entirely possible that annual prison intake could go higher because the largest increase in new admissions in 2000 was among probation violators, despite a smaller average statewide probation population during much of the year.

Moves to parole, on the other hand, decreased by 6% in 2000 compared to 1999. The adjusted projections expect the number of paroles to stabilize at the current level, either by a stable parole approval rate or by a continuing increase in the total number of decisions rendered each year by the Board. Obviously, a significant increase or decrease in the parole approval rate or the number of parole decisions could drive moves to parole far higher or lower than expected.

Finally, Community Residential Programs (CRP) population fell 10% in 2000 compared to 1999. This decline was expected because of the prohibition on CRP placement under Truth in Sentencing, and the population projections were within 3 prisoners of the actual year-end CRP population. The CRP population is expected to decline by a similar amount in 2001 for the same reason and fall more rapidly thereafter, as the second wave of Truth in Sentencing affects prison sentences for all crimes. However, estimates of the CRP population are based on analysis of past population distributions and any unexpected changes in the type or number of prisoners eligible for CRP placement could result in a more rapid decline in the CRP population.

In summary, the prison population projections issued last year have been extremely accurate, and extensive analysis of intake and release trends could not improve on that forecast. However, factors outside the control of the Department could have an unexpected impact on prison population growth. Therefore, we are simply adjusting the existing projections at this time until we see a definite change in the short-term trends, or until the true long-term effects of new sentencing guidelines and Truth in Sentencing become certain.

Prison Population Projections

This past year, intake and release trends have shown remarkable stability and suggest that there is little reason to expect significant shifts in the short term. Consequently, we have adjusted the existing projections to match the starting population in 2001, and neutralized the minor projection error by fine-

tuning the monthly growth estimates for the coming year.

Chart 1 summarizes the adjusted prison population projections through calendar year 2005. Given the stability of recent trends, we are not including a wider range of low growth and high growth estimates at this time. Table 1 shows the specific projection figures on a quarterly basis. Again, projection accuracy will be monitored closely, and a revised forecast will be issued in July if necessary.

Chart 1

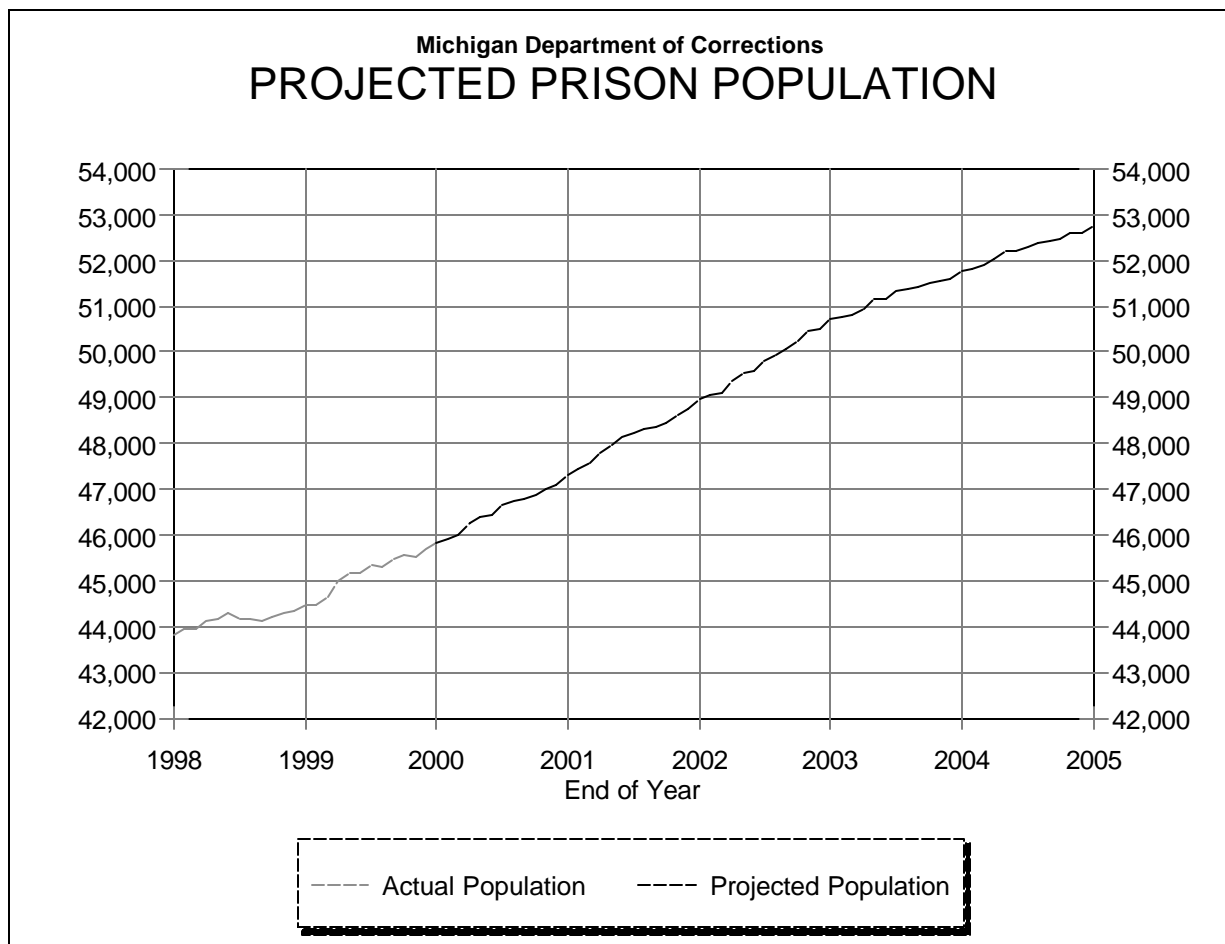


Table 1

**Projected Prison Population
January, 2001**

These projections do not include adjustments for Sentencing Guidelines or the impact of the Truth in Sentencing (TIS) law on prison admission and time served. As the impact of statutory changes becomes apparent, these projections will be revised. However, the expected impact of TIS on the CRP population has been included.

<u>End of Quarter</u>	<u>1/2001 Projection</u>	<u>Sentencing Guidelines Impact</u>	<u>Truth in Sentencing Impact on Admissions & Time Served</u>	<u>Subtract Estimated CRP including TIS Impact</u>	<u>Projected Prison/Camp Population</u>	<u>Yearly Growth</u>
03/01	48,129	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	1,850	46,279	
06/01	48,450	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	1,800	46,650	
09/01	48,624	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	1,750	46,874	
12/01	49,003	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	1,700	47,303	1,482
03/02	49,339	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	1,550	47,789	
06/02	49,619	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	1,400	48,219	
09/02	49,688	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	1,250	48,438	
12/02	50,078	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	1,100	48,978	1,675
03/03	50,254	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	900	49,354	
06/03	50,517	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	700	49,817	
09/03	50,758	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	500	50,258	
12/03	51,059	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	350	50,709	1,731
03/04	51,283	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	350	50,933	
06/04	51,626	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	300	51,326	
09/04	51,750	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	250	51,500	
12/04	52,003	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	250	51,753	1,044
03/05	52,290	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	250	52,040	
06/05	52,504	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	200	52,304	
09/05	52,635	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	150	52,485	
12/05	52,868	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	150	52,718	965